1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

FOLK LIFE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE VILLAGE

It is not without significance that in ceremonies of circumcision and marriage, the boy and the man have to visit the mosque in a ceremonial way where dates and food are distributed. In praise of marriage, a villager would quote the Prophet's saying, 'He who marries has perfected half his religious requirements, and he has only to fear God in the other half'. It is also worth stating that the majority of the personal names of both sexes have some religious meaning or are the names of some religious personalities.

The importance of sacredness not only permeates those levels, justifying acts and deeds, but also reaches the substance of living, namely, foodstuffs and bread, usually referred to as the 'sustenance of Islam' and which are considered to be sacred. A good harvest is a sign of God's approval; a torrent of rain which destroys the villagers' crops is a sign of His disapproval. To impart holiness to the land before sowing, or to the harvest before threshing, a sacrifice of an animal and the partaking of a communal meal are desirable acts. According to the enlightened religious view, the villagers do not distinguish between pagan and the proper Islamic concepts. The village schoolmaster said that the belief in the power of saints, sorcery, and magic, and the appeal to divination and ritual for healing the sick as practised in the village, are complexly interwoven with Islamic beliefs, but they are not in fact a part of the pure Faith.[1] It is believed that sickness might be inflicted by a saint for not fulfilling a vow taken in his name, or for not offering him his due customary gift and sacrifice. A great deal of treatment of disease and of acquiring of good luck could be achieved by prayers, sacred charms, and propitiation of saints. The strength of the religious force could be also ascertained from the fact that the most binding guarantee for a promise is to swear by the name of Allah or to read the Fatiha. It is also customary for the villagers to take an oath sacrifice for God or a saint, which is a kind of conditional oath involving the slaying of an animal on the fulfilment of a certain task and the attendant danger that may ensue in the event of perjury.

The certainty and uniformity in religious beliefs and rituals specially noted in the observance of the fasting month, is an index of the religious group cohesiveness. All the villagers belong to the Maliki school of the Sunni tradition. Most of the adult villagers attend the Friday noon prayers, and say their regular daily prayers either at home or in the mosque. There is a well-known Islamic tradition believed by the villagers that group prayers are more efficacious and rewarding than those said alone.

It is no exaggeration to say that the folk culture of the village is permeated by religious sanctions and moral values derived from the Islamic traditions as revealed in the Koran and also infused with rituals and beliefs of an older tradition. It is not difficult to assert that there is hardly

[1] See John Walker, *Folk Medicine in Modern Egypt*, London, 1934. Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, London, 1930.

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

who married a member of the carpenter family is usually a source of gossip and warning against such mixture. 582

In pursuing the subject of infant nursing, it is to be noted that the child does not rely entirely on mother's milk during all its nursing period, as after the fourth month it is introduced to premasticated adult food. The bits that cannot be swallowed are collected and inserted again in its mouth. Premasticated food is used more in the case of boys than girls, to help mother's milk in accelerating growth. 853

During nursing it is quite common to see a child sucking his fingers or pushing his fist into his mouth. He is actually encouraged in doing this by his mother, who sometimes puts her own finger into the child's mouth. The need is recognized more during the teething period, that is in the fourth or fifth month. For this purpose of sucking, the mother hangs a kind of loose string round the neck of the child with a bundle of hard stuff tied in a piece of cloth, and this is supposed to assist tooth-cutting. 856

When the mother starts weaning her child, she increases the amount of premasticated food given to it. She begins by weaning her child first from one breast, and later from the other. She stops milk from the breast by rubbing the nipple with a concoction of spices, ground sheep tripe, henna, cactus juice and salt stone. After 'stopping milk' the mother turns her dress back to front so that its neck and side openings hang at the back, the child thus finding no access to the breast. For the first two days of weaning, coloured hard-boiled eggs are given to the child to play with and then to eat, whenever he wishes. In psycho-analytical language, mothers in Silwa recognize weaning as a 'traumatic experience' for the child and do their best to absorb the child's attention in other directions, especially in play with other children or providing it with some delicacies of food. 862

The weaning must always be arranged in such a way that it is completed in two or three days before the beginning of the lunar month. It is believed to be very difficult to wean a child after the appearance of the new moon, and it must be left till towards the end of it. It is also believed that a woman who weans at the beginning of the month will find it difficult to bear children. This must be also observed in connection with the circumcision of girls, so that the girl will not become sterile or find it difficult to conceive. Here, one notes the striking relation between the moon and such social phenomena as weaning and circumcision. One might be led to infer that the moon must have been connected with fertility rites in some periods of Egyptian history. It is also observed by mothers that weaning of their children must not be declared immediately, but after a lapse of at least two weeks for fear of the evil eye, or 'pressure' on the mother's power to conceive. [821] [842] [304] [821]

The third basic need of the child, after the mother's bodily warmth and nursing, is the need for 'evacuation'. For the first four months (before the child can sit up) it is allowed to urinate and defaecate in a piece of cloth wrapped round its body from the waist to the knees, under its 854

1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

fact that the mother, in taking the child to the Nile, throws his foreskin, enclosed in a loaf of bread, into the water, and washes the 'mirwad' (antimony stick) used in the operation in the waters of the Nile. This relationship is also evidenced by the fact that circumcision, like weaning, should take place at least two or three days before the appearance of the new moon, otherwise the child is liable to be 'tied up' (mushahir), the consequence of which may be that the wound might not heal quickly, or that the child might eventually be sterile.

Children show great interest in the circumcision ceremony, as it is a great occasion in which they associate with the circumcised child, eat with him, enjoy themselves, inviting people for the ceremony, or going on the children's round with their palm-tree branches, or getting sweets and peanuts during the procession. They usually tell you of the good food they had or the new clothes they wore on the occasion of their younger sibling's or cousin's circumcision. On asking some of the schoolchildren about events during which they felt happy, they invariably gave the answer of a sibling's circumcision or marriage. The educative significance of the ceremony for the older children, who witness and attend this public celebration, though indirect, is quite obvious. The social norms based on mutual obligations, the meaning of kinship and family solidarity, are concomitant in the ritual ceremony.

One cannot discuss circumcision without reference to the psychoanalytical explanation of the ritual. Freud sees in it the castration complex, which is derived from the Oedipus situation. He states that in some primitive societies circumcision is common and is performed at the age of initiation into manhood, and it was only as a secondary development that it was transferred to the early years of life. He continues: 'It is of great interest to find that among primitive peoples, circumcision is combined with cutting the hair, and knocking out of teeth, or is replaced by them, and that our children, who cannot possibly have any knowledge of this, in fact, treat these two operations, in the anxiety with which they react to them, as equivalents of castration.'[1] In Silwa such an anxiety concerning castration is evident in the adults' threatening their children to re-circumcise them even if they are already circumcised, and it manifested itself in one of the children's dreams described later.[2]

Some psycho-analysts maintain that circumcision, as an initiating ceremony of the child by his elders, helps to conduct the growing children across those difficult thresholds of life transformations that demand change in the patterns, not only of conscious, but also of unconscious life.[3] Géza Roheim maintains that circumcision represents a process of the child's growth from the passive Oedipus situation to the active orientation towards the loved object. 'The period of life which conditions the transition from

[1] S. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, footnote, p. 153. [2] See Appendix XI.
[3] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series, New York, 1949, p. 10.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

the water in which he washed it. Then he must walk round the village seven times, and while he thus perambulates he must not speak to anyone. If a passer-by salutes him in the usual way he must reply by touching his forehead with his hand, but he must not speak.

Immediately this walk is accomplished the child will be born.

It is said that a protracted birth never occurs if the husband and wife are both good people, but even if only one of them is bad it may still occur.

If a woman has one miscarriage after another she places the last-born embryo in a niche in the wall inside the house. She takes a red brick—*i.e.*, a brick that has been baked in a kiln, not sun-baked only — and pounds it into powder. She then mixes honey with this powder and eats some of the mixture every day for seven days. At the end of this period she takes the embryo and puts it in a bath, into which she steps, and, squatting over the embryo, she washes herself all over her body. The belief is that the spirit of the embryonic child will enter her body again, and that she will immediately conceive. It is necessary, however, that she and her husband should have marital relations directly after she has had the bath. The body of the embryo is put back into the niche in the wall after she has had the bath and before marital relations take place. It remains there always, but soon falls into dust.

FIG. 31. IRON ANKLETS

When a child is born it is said that a new star appears in the sky. When the child dies, whether in infancy or at any later period, its star falls. Hence the falling stars.[1] The star falls two or three

[1] The same belief is current in some parts of England.

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
COPTS MR10

THE FELLĀḤĪN OF UPPER EGYPT

minutes after the death of the person to whom it belongs. Another explanation of falling stars is that they are darts aimed by God at unbelievers. Lane says[1] that they are believed to be darts thrown by God at evil *ginn*, usually called *'afārīt*.

Certain precautions must be taken by a woman after she has given birth to a child. A woman who has lately lost her baby must not enter the room where a woman is being confined, nor for seven days after this event. If this taboo is broken the woman who was last confined will have no milk for her baby.

If a cat gives birth to kittens which all die, and a woman gives birth to a child in the same house in which the cat had its kittens, the cat must be taken away from the house or the baby may die. Or, if it lives, the mother will have no milk.

Near a small village in Asyūṭ Province there is a stone, roughly conical in shape, standing in the fields, and surrounded by whatever crops are being cultivated on that spot. It is said that men have often tried to dig it up, excavating to a considerable depth all round it, but no one has ever been able to come to the bottom of the stone. It is believed by the peasants to be very ancient. A certain mystery is attached to it because of these beliefs, thereby doubtless enhancing its magical value. Women who have not enough milk with which to nurse their children visit this stone on a Friday. They must not speak when coming to and going away from the spot, and they should step over it, still preserving absolute silence, seven times. After this, it is believed, they will have no difficulty in suckling their infant. I was told that the stone has been visited for this purpose, among others, for a hundred years or more.

If a woman or child brings meat to a house where there is a woman who has a child under seven days old that person must not go into the mother's room, but the latter must come out of her room and step over the meat three times. If she does not do this she will have no milk.

When a woman who is a Christian, whether Copt, Protestant, or of any other denomination, has given birth to a child her relatives take some wheat flour and mix it with water. Out of this dough they make several crosses, sticking them on the walls of the room occupied by the mother and child. The greatest

[1] *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1871), vol. i, p. 283.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

Rain-Songs.

16.

539×
821

In spite of the overflowing of the Nile, rain is regarded by the Egyptian peasant, as a most desirable aid; and especially so, of course, in bad years.

Ya rabbĕ tišti,
we-billĕ bišti;
wel-'amḥ yirḫaṣ
we-amla kirši.

O Lord, let it rain,
Wet my little dress!
So that corn will be cheaper,
And I can fill my belly!

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

17.

×539
● 821 "Rain, pour it out", that is, all the water which you can give, so that all the vessels in the house will overflow, even
[351] to the coffee-cups. Both personal names ('Abdulle and 'Abd-el-'âl) are taken, of course, only to rhyme with the names of the vessels. It is certainly mere accident, that the name 'Abdalla appears also in a similar rain-song of Dalman's (P. 175; from Aleppo).

Ya naṭaret 'Abdulle,
ṣubbīha wimla-l-'ulle.
Ya naṭaret 'Abd-el-'âl,
ṣubbīha wimla-l-fingāl.

O Rain of 'Abdulle,
Pour it out and fill the water-bottle!
O Rain of 'Abd-el-'āl.
Pour it out and fill the cup.

[415] 2. 'ulle are the water-bottles, of porous, unglazed clay, in which the drinking-water is kept fresh.

4. Fingāl (fingān) are the little coffee-cups without handles, which are placed in little stands (zarf) resembling egg-cups.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

19.

×539
821

Song to a sun-shower.

ʿĒb ʿalēk, ya naṭare,
wes-sams mefattaḥe.

Shame yourself, O rain,
For the sun has broken through!

2. Literally: "has opened". The same word is used with flowers which are unfolding, e. g. No. 6, l. 7.

20.

Preparations for a Feast.

539
527
821
252
356
482

Faṭne (Fatme), the daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, and her husband ʿAli, are represented in the song as simple Egyptian peasants. She is about to bake cakes for the feast; first hastily cleaning the house and carrying the basket of sweepings out upon her head. Everyone who is acquainted with Egyptian villages will have often seen this picture.

ʿAli, the master of the house, to please his wife, has gone as far as southern Upper Egypt, for the sake of an iron hook, for taking bread from the oven. At the beginning, the sun, which has hidden behind the clouds, is requested to show its pleasantest face at the feast; for there is not continuous blue sky in northern Upper Egypt. At Saqqāra, in winter, we [132] often had an overcast sky and heavy rainfalls.

Fattaḥi, ya semṣe, ya semṣe,
lagl ʿAli u-Moḥammadî
we-Faṭne, bint en-nabi!
u-ʿaginha ʾuddamha.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

539x
527
821

Rāḥet tekubbē-trabha
we-zaḥferān fi-kmamha.
we-gōzha rāḥ eṣ-ṣa'īd
yegīb-liha baškār ḥadīd,
tiḫbiz-bo kaḥk el-'īd, kaḥk el-'īd.

Come out again, O sun, dear sun,
For 'Ali's and Moḥammed's sakes
And Fatne's, daughter of the Prophet!
Her dough stands there before her.
She went to empty out her dust;
Saffron colored were her sleeves.
Her goodman has gone to the Ṣa'īd,
To fetch for her an iron hook,
That she may bake with it the cakes for the feast,
the cakes for the feast!

1. Literally: "open yourself"; compare No. 19, l. 2.

6. Upon raising the arm which supports the basket, the sleeve of the yellow, under garment is visible. The outer garments of the peasant women are generally black. [20]

7. Southern Upper Egypt (eṣ-ṣa'īd, as the region south of Aṣyûṭ is called) is often a synonym for a long distance. A similar example in No. 128, l. 1. Aṣyûṭ is about as far from Saqqāra as New York is from Washington, or Davenport from London. [195] [484]

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

35.

ʿafa-lla ʿad 539x
we-bṭilna we-fāt el-miʿâd! 461

Working-time is over, again,
We are "finished" and time is up!

2. Compare No. 34, note on l. 2.

36.

"It will be dark before we reach home, so call a halt!" 539x
Almost all peasants who are away from the village at nightfall, feel very uncomfortable, see No. 4, Note on l. 8. Our boy, Abu Bekr (see preface, p. VIII), once wrote me: Ellēl ṛūl, we-kull en-nās teḫāf minno: "The night is a witch and everybody is afraid of her". 821

Ya sīdi, ya-lli-msauwaḥna,
ya dōb es-sams terauwaḥna.

O Sir, thou who hast brought us (hither),
The sun will hardly bring us (home)!

1. That is to say: by whose command we have come to work.

37.

Compare the remark on No. 36.

Ya sīdi, ya-lli-mdādīna,
ya dōb es-sams tewaddīna.

O Sir, thou who treatest us kindly,
The sun will scarcely guide us (home)!

1. "Treatest .. kindly": as a nurse (dāda) would.

[P. 36 is blank]

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

89.

The Wind, the Rogue.

x539
821
[114]

Tantavy, in Traité de la langue arabe vulgaire, p. 222 (hence of the year 1848) has this same little song in a slightly varying form. According to that version we have inserted ʿāni in our last line, in order to rhyme with gāni, instead of ḫāli as Maḥmūd gave it.

Ḥabaṭ el-hawa fil-bāb,
ʾult el-ḥelēwe gāni.
Atarīk, ya hawa, kaddāb,
beyiḍḥak ʿala-l-ʾalb el-ʿāni.

The wind knocked at the door,
And I said: "My little sweetheart has come to me."
Therefore art thou a rogue, O wind,
Who laughs at a grieving heart.

8:Schaefer A-5 (1900-1901) 1904
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

120.

Ye Stars of the Night!

'Alye is the ladylove of the noted hero of romance, Abu Zēd, whose life forms a favorite theme for public recitations. He belonged to the tribe of the Beni Hilāl.

Ya nugūm el-lēl, šūfu mā garā-li!
Mā yenām il-lēl illa abu 'albē ḫali.
Ya ma baket 'Alye 'al-Abu Zēd el-Hilāli!

Ye stars of the night, see what has happened to me!
At night he only, sleeps, whose heart is free.
How hath 'Alye wept for Abu Zēd el-Hilali!

9: Klunzinger D-5 (1863-1875) 1878
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

796 the people begin to be in an active and excited state. Numerous groups collect in the open spaces and scan the
• [821] western horizon to see if they can discover the new moon; since it is only on the testimony of a Moslim that he has seen the new moon—though he may be a man of no account whatever—that the festival can begin. Even the most accurate astronomical calculation, so far as this is possible, has not the same authority. The rising and setting of the new as well as of the full moon are not regulated exactly by those of the sun, since the synodic or lunar month contains 29 days, 12 hours, and 44 minutes, and the time of conjunction, when moon, earth, and sun are in a right line, happens at very different hours of the day in different months. The time at which the new moon, so eagerly looked for by the Mohammedans, first reappears after astronomical new-moon also depends upon the season of the year; it is seen earliest in the spring months, for reasons depending upon the position of the moon's path relatively to that of the sun. An astronomer says that he has not seen the moon earlier than forty hours after nor later than twenty-seven hours before the astronomical new-moon, but that by a combination of all favourable circumstances this may even happen within twenty-four hours, and travellers maintain that they have seen the old moon on the morning and the new moon on the evening of the same day. To these considerations one is led who every year looks on, while the Moslimin thus eagerly and for the most part uselessly watch the heavens. Since the official calendar pays no attention to this important
[805] method of determining Ramadan, it simply gives, now to one month, now to another, thirty or twenty-nine days in order to make up the total of 354. Accordingly, when the first of Ramadan occurs in the calendar, it is by no means certain whether at the same time the new moon is visible. The more scientific among the heads of the province often actually cause the fast to be altered a day till the moon is perfectly visible in the evening sky. When Ramadan falls in winter, at which season the sky is often clouded, and in high latitudes, where it is gloomy for weeks at a time, the determina-